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ABSTRACT

Information management, getting the educational message out to the people, is the backbone to the overall Extension mission. Those employed in information departments must be continually aware of the latest developments which might update and improve present operations, both regarding subject matter and information media techniques. Those in information management are arriving at a point in which a different direction or "road" may be taken. The familiar producer route has been one of service to programs. Although the producer aspect is of vital importance, the new planner or consultant road includes the added dimensions of the information specialist being a member of the overall decision making team in programming or managing Extension information. They must keep up with rapid changes, trends, and developments in the communication field, using a multi-media approach to reach larger and more diverse audiences. Ways to get new ideas going include getting to know co-workers better, attending departmental planning meetings, and talking with the Director about ideas. To get on this consultant road, become a craftsman in the field, develop habits of dependability, become self-motivated, look at the broad picture, and think things through logically. (SC)

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A DIRECTOR LOOKS AT INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Some few years ago, when I was in high school, I had a rather frustrating experience. We had just finished reading Hamlet and were given a test on the play. One of the questions was, "Why did Hamlet hesitate in killing the king?" The teacher was expecting a few paragraphs about the nature of Hamlet's character. I simply answered the question in one sentence: "If Hamlet had not hesitated, the story would not have been long enough for a play." Even though I still think my answer was correct, the teacher didn't give me a very good grade.

In sharing my views of Extension information management with you, I could get into the same trouble. I could very simply and correctly state that the purpose of information management is to get the educational message out to the people. If I did, you would feel cheated since you are well aware of that fact. So, in order to better carry out my assignment, I will elaborate on one basic fact: In order for Extension to do a successful job, information departments must do their job well. Your departments must understand their mission; they must have goals and ideals, and they must relate to and communicate effectively with other members of the Extension team. In fact, they must be the best informed people in Extension about Extension.

Talk by Dr. W. M. Bost, Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Mississippi State University, Mississippi State, Mississippi, at National Effective Media Communications Seminar held at National 4-H Center, Washington, D. C., October 30, 1972.

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Let us consider for a moment the total Extension mission and how the information department fits in. Obviously, when Extension established the information function, it had a good reason. It expected something from the information departments. Presumably, what it expected then, and what it still expects, goes hand-in-hand with the long-range goals that the State Extension Service has set for itself. You've got to know what these goals are -- and be in tune with them. You information people cannot function in a vacuum. You have to know the reasoning behind decisions and programs, and where we're trying to go.

As you know, our responsibility in Extension is to provide practical and useful information to the people of the United States.... that is our overall Extension mission. I believe that our information departments can and must be the backbone of this operation. You are the technical experts in communications. It is your job to keep Extension administration and the program specialists up to date on the constant changes and scientific developments in educational communications. This means that you must give us your expert opinion of any changes that occur concerning our methods and techniques of information-giving. To stay in the "ball game," we must be aware of all the latest developments in communication. We are competing with the best, and we have to at least match the best in all that we do.

We must be on the lookout for any new development which might update and improve our present operations. We are competing more and more for the minds and time of people. In earlier days, Extension was

about the only source of scientific information for many people. Today there is a constant flood of new material. No one person, no matter how good, can possibly keep up with it, much less get it distributed to the various publics.

With faster transportation and improved media, it's not uncommon at all for a farmer to get on the telephone or jump into his car and "run down to the College" to find out the very latest. You really can't blame him when the information he needs is for a million-dollar decision.

We also have a constant flow of all kinds of information from farm magazines, radio, newspapers, TV, field representatives of the feed, fertilizer and chemical companies, banks, and various federal and state agencies. I'm told that some scientists are predicting that our larger farmers will have personal computer hookup to Wall Street by the year 2000! If we stay in the running and ever hope to get in the lead, we've got to keep abreast of what's happening. We can't afford to have people say "it's the same old stuff we've had for years," or that it is "not up-to-date."

What I'm saying applies to subject-matter material certainly, but I want to focus these same ideas on information media techniques. Are you offering to your administration and program specialists the very latest techniques? . . .are you challenging them to use them? . . .or do you have equipment or knowledge that's gathering dust on the shelf?

Are you searching for the new and innovative, or are you comfortable with things the way they are and hope no one will rock the boat? Have you changed your mind about a person or an idea in the last six months? If you don't want to operate in a vacuum, then you have to reach out, know what's going on, and be a part of it. You can and should have a role in Extension programming. The choice is primarily up to you. If you are innovative, if you can dream up new ideas and use them and challenge your co-workers to use them, if you can reach out and take a slice of the decision-making pie, you will be welcome to eat it, and you and Extension and the clientele will all benefit from your doing it. Or, if you take things as they come, and if you are a "chore boy" and if you are satisfied with the status quo, then it's likely you will be allowed to stay where you are and wither on the vine. What I'm trying to say is: you're going to have to prove your worth if you want to move from "producer" to "planner" and/or "consultant."

TWO ROADS

Where do these choices lead you? What are the prospects for information specialists as a group? As individual practitioners? It seems quite clear to me that we have arrived at a fork in the road for information management. There's something like a new planning or consultant road and an old production road. You may be traveling either road, you may be starting to scout the new road, or you may travel both roads at different times.

You're probably thinking, "What does he mean, new planning or consultant road -- old production road? Which one am I on?" Let me explain what I mean.

1. PRODUCER ROAD

The old, familiar producer or production route had been one of service to programs. Some of you call it a "chore boy" role, apparently feeling that your job is one of only responding to the requests of others. I must admit that it is sometimes easy to think about your work in this way. But, I hope most of you do not. Even if you feel you are traveling the old route, the "producer" route, as I am describing it, the work you do is most important and most necessary.

Every Director wants an information team that can and will respond to his needs and to the needs of the Extension organization. Often times, these needs are urgent. You know what I mean when I say we Directors often want things yesterday. . . .and we appreciate the hard work and long hours that many of you give, but we must have quick and effective responses from you, often under great pressure. I believe the only way this will change is to get worse. This is the kind of world the Director lives in and you have to share it with him. My advice to you would be the same as Harry Truman's, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen."

If I am announcing a new program, or publicizing an ongoing effort for that matter, I depend heavily on my information staff to advise me on the best way to inform our various publics of what we are doing. Nothing could be more important, because the image we project as an organization has impact for all of us collectively and individually. I want our news writers to be ready and able to prepare copy that attracts attention and gets the message across. I also want our publications editor to have the latest knowledge of style, paper, inks, and design. Putting out an attractive, readable publication is of top importance because we do so much of it. Many of you are familiar with the drab blues, greens, the long mimeographs, etc., so long used by the Federal establishment, and they immediately smell "government." You know how some of them reach the intended audience. In our University setting we are not hamstrung with some of the constraints of a large bureaucracy like the Federal Government, but we do need, and we must have, imagination and the desire to excel on the part of our people. So please don't fret if you think you are too much on the old, production road. We must continue to travel this road. We may need to pave it so we can go faster, produce more, with better quality, but we cannot lay it aside! Therefore, we must have excellence in the people who perform the basic technical skills of writing, proofing, editing, typing and developing, and in all those who help us produce competitively in this modern society which

prides itself on its achievements in the art of communication. (And these also must be managed!)

2. PLANNER AND CONSULTANT ROAD

The new road, or the planner or consultant road, is one that makes the information specialist a member of the overall decision-making team in programming or managing Extension information. That is, the information specialist who has what it takes and is willing to devote the energy and effort to earn his place on the team is very much needed in this new role.

As Extension programs become more complex and our audiences become more varied, we must have information specialists who are "bridge-builders." They must keep up with the rapid changes, trends, and developments in the communication field. They must use these new ideas and make them available to the entire Extension family and they have a lot of "public relating" to do. (Other communicators, radio, TV, editors, etc.)

This new breed of communicator must not be like a puppet waiting for his string to be pulled. He must act on his own to stimulate and challenge his co-workers to use the most effective means of communication available. As I see it, he must be more than one who is skilled in such mechanics as writing a news story, taking a picture, preparing

a design, editing a publication, or appearing on radio or television. Yes, he or she must be able to do more than one of these things--and do them well--but, he must also be an educator who can hold his own with any other educator in the University. He should have a solid background in the philosophy and principles of education or a related field. He also must be an armchair psychologist who can study trends, analyze audiences, deal with people, and develop programs for them.

It would be much more dramatic to add that the two roads in information management are independent, that there are no crossovers between the new road and the old road. This would not be realistic, for in most cases the old road may be used as a driver training route for travel on the new road. As I have already said, the specialists on the new road must also be able to handle the mechanics of information well and they must be able to help others learn how to use them effectively.

And before you read into this forecast an inference that the two roads separate the sheep from the goats, the wheat from the chaff, or the saved from the damned, let me correct any such impression. I have already mentioned that both roads are necessary and important, but I want to underscore my feeling on the matter. Both roads promise respectable, satisfying, worthwhile careers. So information specialists have a choice--they can find useful careers in the information services on the old road, or they can shoot for the moon and qualify themselves

for membership in the decision-making team on the new road.

The natural questions at this point are, of course: Why a fork in the road? Who needs a new road? What's wrong with the old road? Why can't top management play with its policy decisions, its organizational relationships, and its administrative matters and leave the driving to us?

The answers to all of these questions are quite reasonably short and direct. The old road is not adequate because it simply isn't getting information management where it must go, and more importantly, it isn't getting Extension where it must go. Information staff members need to see the big picture. They must commit themselves to the total Extension "systems" concept. It's much easier and more comfortable to publicize the development of a new variety of corn than it is to publically answer "Hard Tomatoes--Hard Times," or to refute a news story about farmers producing beef for 2¢ per pound, or to "sell" the Extension budget request.

Too often, we get bogged down in our own mire of detail, personal concerns, and inertia. Instead of thinking about what we can do to get the message across, we spend untold time sitting around thinking about how some new idea won't work. We're locked in with our own locks.

Let me ask these questions: Do you read all the material you can get in your area? What is the latest "scoop" in your field? When have you taken courses for self-improvement? If I see someone doing

something I can't do, it's usually because he knows something I don't know. If I want to do that job, then I've got to find out how to do it. If I have a two-bit attitude, that's usually about the degree of my accomplishment; but if I have a $10,000 attitude, I can accomplish that, too. (Example: A new Harvard law graduate, with no money, will buy a Cadillac. A new Mississippi State University agricultural graduate, with no money, will buy a used Ford. What does this say about their image? their expectations? I think we need more of the Cadillac attitude in Extension.)

We must have the new road because you have something to offer, and administration and subject matter folks need you.

Over the years, the role of the Extension man has changed greatly. Early Extension people rode in buggies, on horses, Model T Fords, and trains to reach people. Today, they are using multi-media communications....radio, television, letters, personal visits, and publications. We constantly take looks at ourselves like "A People and A Spirit." With Extension's "new face" of reaching larger and more diverse audiences, we are becoming more aware of ways to reach these different clientele. We're competing with professionals in all walks of life, and we have to rise to the challenge to make ourselves heard.

Because of the changes in Extension policies, attitudes, audiences, and directions, there is more need than ever before for better communication and cooperation between program staff and information staff. You can and should be a vital member of the programming team. If you are to play in this kind of ball game, then you can't be left alone, nor can you leave administration and subject-matter folks alone. Communication is a two-way street and today we need the best possible minds working toward solutions.

Every Director I know is always on the lookout for "can do" kinds of people, staff members who can come up with new and workable ideas. But Directors are busy men, and they don't have time to give the personal motivation to every staff member like some folks seem to need. You have got to have a certain amount of self-motivation. When you see how a new technique or development in information technology can benefit Extension, it's your responsibility to get the ball rolling.

One way you can get your ideas going is to get to know your subject matter co-workers better. Do you isolate yourself in your own department, or do you work at ways of intermingling with the entire Extension team? When planning time comes, it would be well for you to be involved in ground-floor planning strategy for delivering our Extension information. You can make valuable inputs by attending departmental planning meetings or committee meetings. At this point, you're probably saying, "Who's kidding whom? The first thing we have to do

is get invited to these kinds of meetings.". . .And right you are!! But you'll never get invited if you don't try. . . .and I don't necessarily mean go up to the department head and tell him you want to be invited. You might just get turned down! But it's always been my experience that nothing breeds success like success. Look for some way to show what you can do, deliver the goods. Work to get a reputation for having something to offer. If you do this, you'll get more invitations than you can handle.

Talk to your Director about what you want to do, what you are doing, and what you plan to do. Don't wait for him to tell you what to do. . . .take the bull by the horns, and tell the administration about your plans, your needs, and your problems. Most Directors will appreciate your drive and initiative, and they'll open doors for you. I'd rather have my staff members do something and make a few mistakes than to have them sit back wondering what to do. Most managers, including Extension Directors, have the welcome mat out for new and innovative ideas that will pay off, even if they cost more. Victor Hugo once said that "Nothing else in the world. . .is so powerful as an idea whose time has come."

Just to assure you this is not all talk, I want to share with you a few examples of information management in Mississippi. Sure, like everyone else we have room to grow, but we do have some accomplish-

ments that I'm very proud of. (And we're now going through some reorganization and realignment of our information staff in order to better handle both of the roads we've been discussing.)

One of our most effective information and promotional efforts has been our 1.5 x '75 program. And I use the word "promotional" intentionally because I believe this ingredient is necessary today in carefully prescribed amounts. In 1965, we developed this program in Mississippi to do two things: (1) to increase agricultural income 62 percent, to 1.5 billion dollars over the 10-year period, and (2) to enhance or build the Extension image in our state. Goals were set for all major commodities; outlook material is emphasized each year; and complete educational and informational support is given to the programs. Agents use the slogan extensively in their local efforts.

Our total staff is involved in this effort and information personnel have a significant role. We designed a symbol which we use on letterhead, cards, slides, bumper stickers, etc., to promote 1.5 x '75. We developed slide manuscripts, radio and TV programs, and speeches. Our information staff has worked hand-in-hand with both state and county staffs in developing local promotional programs. Each year we have a statewide meeting for agricultural and governmental leaders from all over the state. State political leaders, including our Governor, are anxious to participate. Our information personnel have the major responsibility

for working with our specialist staff in developing the program for this presentation. In the past, we have used two carousel projectors for a slide presentation. . . .and someone has already suggested that we consider a movie for one of the future presentations.

This has been a most effective program in letting the people and our State legislators know what we're doing. We have built every possible communication program around this theme, and it has paid off.

Another example is our 68 foot exhibit for the Mississippi State Fair, "Planned Progress for YOU." A committee of our top people, including several from our information department, put their heads together on this major project. The final design includes four sections: one each for Agriculture, Family Living, Community Development, and 4-H. It can be used as one complete exhibit, or separated and used by section. Our information people "led the pack" for this total staff effort.

Our Home Economics Focus program is another good illustration of effective cooperation between our information staff and program personnel. When we received the national Focus materials and made the decision to develop Mississippi materials, a committee of program specialists and information representatives met to determine the type of information packet and other materials that we would need. As a result, we developed our own attractively bound booklet to convey the message to our clientele.

We have been concerned about the lack of information support we have been able to give our county staffs. In an attempt to overcome this weakness, we have hired an Area Information Specialist to cover one of the districts. His job is to go from county to county and discuss with the staff their informational programs. He also assists them in any way he can to help them get the news before the public. Since the beginning of this program, publicity in the form of stories and pictures from that area greatly increased. We're hoping that we'll soon be able to give this kind of information programming support to our other three districts.

Another kind of cooperative effort with our county staffs has been to design exhibits and displays for shopping malls. I'm sure most of your states are experiencing the growth in these malls just as we are in Mississippi. A tremendous number of people can be reached in this way through attractive, catchy, easy-to-understand messages. Our information staff has been instrumental in these teaching methods. They sit down with the county staffs and work out the details and design of the exhibit.

Have you ever been asked, "What is the Extension Service?" If you have, you know how we sometimes have to rack our brains to come up with a simple and clear-cut answer to what we do. Our information department has helped us work on this problem by developing an audio slide set titled, "What's an Extension Service?" To compile this set,

every state subject-matter specialist was asked to contribute. It required vision of our total mission and a concern for the image we would project. The finished product is about 25 minutes long and can be used for civic club meetings, county meetings, at schools, and for our own induction training for new employees. It is most effective for showing the many faces of Extension in a relatively short time.

These examples are just a few of the ways in which information management can be done through total staff effort. It takes everybody doing their part. Some days you are giving primary leadership, and on other days you are playing a supporting role. You criss-cross from the old road to the new road again and again.

During the past few minutes I have tried to give you a little "Southern soul food" to chew on. Admittedly, these ideas are only one Director's thinking. Some of the things I've mentioned have been "thorns" in the flesh of information people for many years--that they never seem to get a piece of the real action, that they were not members of the top management decision-making team, and that their role is one of "chore boys." I can't say that this has always been the case. If it has, then we Directors had better look at our management policies, and you information folks had better take an inward look at yourselves and ask, "Why?" Usually, if you are worthy of being included on top decisions, you will be.

I'm sure, whatever the situation in your state, we all have a common goal of helping people to have improved family living. We believe in Extension . . . .and we want to see it prosper and grow. Likewise, we Extension Directors want you as Extension staff members and individuals to prosper and grow. There is no magic formula for instant success.

But if you want to take the new road, here are five road signs I believe you need to follow:

First, you have to become a craftsman in your field. If you don't know how to do a job--learn. Take pride in your work. Try to be the best "whatever you are" on your staff. Keep up with the latest developments in your field. Don't fret or "duck" this "production" work. Do it freely and well and be of good cheer, and opportunities for planning and consulting will automatically open up.

Second, develop habits of dependability if you want to be on the top management team. How many times have I heard other Directors say that they have 50 to 100 State staff members, but they can count on one hand the number they know they can always depend on. We Directors look for people who can take a job and deliver, who have initative, who offer suggestions and ideas. You have the

"platform" and the opportunity to make yourself almost indispensable to the operation of Extension in your state.

Third, become self-motivated. You've got to want to be somebody ..... to do a job well. Your attitude is all important ..... get it right and you can climb mountains. Think positive. If you can think, you can!

Fourth, look at the big picture. Climb out of your technical nutshell and look at the broad spectrum of Extension. Take a "systems approach" to what Extension is all about.

Fifth, be logical and think things through. Don't shoot from the hip with the first idea that comes to mind or with something that will grab a headline. We need more and more staff members who have the ability to sift through materials and come up with the essentials. You have to know more about Extension and where it is going and what it is becoming than most anyone else!

I believe you see by now that I believe the information management person is a special kind of person.